

The greatest enemy of knowledge is not ignorance, it is the illusion of knowledge

—Stephen Hawking

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# ‘What led man to create God?’

Religion and gods perhaps took shape to provide security to humans who were fearful of the unknown, writes FARIDA KHANAM

The way religion came into being, or evolved in the initial stages is not accurately known to us. However, many historians and scholars widely assume that the need to worship and believe in a God or Being must have originated in the mind of our early ancestors due to the feeling of fear. Man had no knowledge of the world around him.

Every natural phenomenon was regarded as something to be terrified of; an unknown force, something unexplainable and beyond understanding, and attributed to the work of this unseen, unknown force. So, for early human beings, the need to please or propitiate the unknown powerful Being must have arisen.

Religion may have been created to give oneself the feeling of security in an insecure world. Giving a form to this unknown power in different ways, like the form of animals, some obscure forms, trees that appeared unnatural, and the earth itself, gave man a feeling of control over his environment.

The earliest evidence of religion



JUDGEMENT OF THE DEAD, PAINTING ON PAPYRUS

can be found in excavations of burial sites. The human burial remains indicate a sort of ritual burial, which represented an awareness of life and death, and a possible belief in the afterlife. Philip Lieberman states that “burials with grave goods clearly signify religious practices and concern for the dead that transcends daily life.”

Such early evidences can be seen

from Atapuerca in Spain, where bones of around 30 humans have been found in a pit. Neanderthals are also believed to have buried their dead. Skeletons were found in shallow graves with stone tools and animal bones, which historians believe, points to the emotional connect of the living with the deceased and a possible belief in the afterlife. The earliest

known burial of modern humans is found in a cave in Israel in a place called Qafzeh. These remains have been dated to 100,000 years ago. A variety of goods were also found at the burial site.

Symbols are used to indicate or represent something. And they have been used in religion since ancient times. Archaeologist Steven Muthén contends that it is common for religious practices to involve the creation of images, and symbols represent supernatural beings and ideas. Some of the earliest evidence of symbolic behaviour is associated with the Middle Stone Age sites in Africa. Due to the association of art and religion, evidence of symbolism in the fossil records is indicative of a mind capable of religious thought.

Organised forms of religion are believed to have begun around 11,000 years ago in the Near East. At the same time, it is also not ruled out that religion may have existed independently in several other places around the world. Man's transition from a food

gatherer to cultivator leading a settled life has transformed him in significant ways. This settled lifestyle developed forms of religion as a means of providing stable social and economic life. The history of religion began with the invention of writing around 3000 BCE in the Near East.

A 19th century German school of thought depicts religion as evolving with human culture. Writing is believed to have been first invented in either Sumeria or ancient Egypt. The pyramid texts from ancient Egypt are one of the oldest known religious texts dating to between 2400-2300 BCE.

In ancient religious societies, religious traditions and beliefs were transmitted orally. But with the advent of writing, religious teachings or rituals could be recorded and stored. Writing, therefore, enabled religions to develop coherent and comprehensive doctrinal systems that remained independent of time and place. From the author's A Study of World's Major Religions, Chau Publishing Company. ■